

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0434

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT MP
SUBJECT: RESULTS OF APRIL 24 MAURITIAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

REF: PORT LOUIS 0418

SUMMARY. THE VOTERS RETURNED A SPLIT DECISION IN THE
APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, GIVING THE MAURITIAN MILITANT
MOVEMENT (MMM) CONTROL OF THREE TOWN COUNCILS AND THE GOVERN-
MENT ALLIANCE OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL
DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) CONTROL OF THE OTHER TWO. OVERALL
EACH SIDE WON EXACTLY HALF OF THE 126 MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
SEATS. IN POPULAR VOTE THE MMM APPEARS TO HAVE WON BETTER
THAN 50 PERCENT, WHICH IT IS INTERPRETING AS A REPUDIATION
OF THE GOVERNING COALITION BY THE ELECTORATE. THE COALITION
IS CONSOLING ITSELF THAT THE OUTCOME WAS NOT AS BAD AS SOME
EXPECTED, AND IS PLEASED THAT PMSD LEADER GAETAN DUVAL WON
A SUBSTANTIAL VICTORY IN CUREPIPE. IT IS EVEN MORE PLEASED
THAT PAUL BERENGER, SECRETARY GENERAL AND ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER
OF THE MMM, WAS DEFEATED FOR A SEAT IN QUATRE BORNES, AS
WERE SEVEN OTHER SITTING MMM MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY. A
RELATIVELY LOW VOTER TOUNOUT (70 PERCENT OVERALL) HURT THE
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COALITION. WHILE IT CANNOT BE SAID THAT THE COALITION WAS
DEFEATED, THE MMM MADE A SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT ON ITS
PERFORMANCE IN THE DECEMBER PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND HAS
ADDED TO ITS MOMENTUM TOWARD EVENTUALLY TAKING POWER. END
SUMMARY.

1. THERE WAS A 70 PERCENT OVERALL TURNOUT BY THE VOTERS

IN THE APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, INCLUDING A LOW OF 60 PERCENT IN PORT LOUIS, WHICH HAD BEEN MORE OR LESS CONCEDED TO THE MMM. THE ALLIANCE CANDIDATES DID BEST IN CUREPIPE AND QUATRE BORNES, WHERE THE TURNOUT WAS HIGHEST (75 PERCENT AND 73 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY), GIVING CREDENCE TO THE BELIEF THAT ABSTENTIONS HURT THE COALITION ALLIANCE OF LABOR AND THE PMSD.

2. THE RESULTS ANNOUNCED ON APRIL 25 WERE AS FOLLOWS:

	MMM COUNCILLORS	ALLIANCE COUNCILLORS
PORT LOUIS	21	9
CUREPIPE	1	23
BEAU BASSIN/ROSE HILL	15	9
QUATRE BORNES	10	14
VACOAS/PHOENIX	16	8
TOTALS	63	63

THE MMM THUS WON CONTROL OF THREE TOWNS, PORT LOUIS, BEAU BASSIN AND VACOAS, WHILE THE COALITION WON CUREPIPE AND QUATRE BORNES. OF THE 19 WARDS, THE MMM WON 9, THE ALLIANCE WON 8, AND TWO WERE SPLIT.

3. EACH SIDE IS NATURALLY INTERPRETING THE RESULT AS A VICTORY, IN EMPHASIZING DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE OUTCOME. THE ALLIANCE IS BLAMING THE RELATIVELY HIGH RATE OF ABSTENTIONS FOR ITS POOR SHOWING IN A PLACE SUCH AS VACOAS, WHICH IT SHOULD HAVE WON ON THE BASIS OF ITS HAVING TAKEN ALL THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IN DECEMBER. THE MMM SAYS THE ABSTENTIONS REPRESENT A REPUDIATION OF THE ALLIANCE BY TRADITIONAL SUPPORTERS OF THE PMSD AND THE LABOR PARTY. THE ONLY REAL SURPRISE WAS IN VACOAS, FOR THE MMM WAS EXPECTED TO WIN PORT LOUIS AND BEAU BASSIN, WHILE THE ALLIANCE WAS THE ANTICIPATED WINNER IN CUREPIPE AND QUATRE BORNES, AS WELL AS IN VACOAS (SEE REFTEL). FOR ITS PART THE MMM IS STRESSING ITS SHARE OF THE POPULAR VOTE IN THE WHOLE URBAN AREA, WHICH IT HAS CALCULATED AT 52.04 PERCENT AS AGAINST 47.03 PERCENT FOR THE ALLIANCE. (THE MMM HAS PROBABLY SOMEWHAT OVERESTIMATED ITS POPULAR VOTE, WHICH WILL NEED TO BE CHECKED WHEN THE FINAL OFFICIAL TALLY IS AVAILABLE.) THE MMM CONCLUDES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE MAURITIAN ELECTORATE HAS REPUDIATED THE COALITION, WHICH OF COURSE OVERLOOKS THE FACT THAT 57 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN THESE TOWN ELECTIONS.

4. MAURITIANS TEND TO PERSONALIZE POLITICAL CONTESTS, IN THIS CASE TO VIEW IT AS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN GAETAN DUVAL,

TRYING TO MAKE A COMEBACK IN CUREPIPE, AND MMM LEADER PAUL BERENGER, WHO RAN IN HIS HOME TOWN AND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT OF QUATRE BORNES. DUVAL WAS ELECTED EASILY AND LED HIS LIST. BERENGER ALSO LED HIS LIST IN QUATRE BORNES, BUT HE RAN NINTH, ALL EIGHT SEATS AT STAKE BEING WON BY PMSD CANDIDATES. THE ALLIANCE IS CORWING OVER BERENGER'S DEFEAT, AND THEY ARE ALSO EMPHASIZING THE DEFEAT OF SEVEN OTHER SITTING MMM ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WHO RAN IN THESE ELECTIONS: SURESH MOORBA, HARRIS RAMPHUL, JEAN CLAUDE AUGUSTAVE AND JEROME BOULLE IN PORT LOUIS, FINLAY SALESSE IN BEAU BASSIN; DWARKANATH GUGGAH IN QUATRE BORNES; AND AMEDEE DARGA IN CUREPIPE. THE LAST-NAMED RAN BEHIND A MME. CAPRICE, A SEAMSTRESS WHO LED THE MMM TICKET IN DUVAL'S DISTRICT DOUBTLESS OWING TO PMSD SUPPORT, AS THE PMSD RAN ONLY SEVEN OF ITS OWN PEOPLE FOR THE EIGHT SEATS AND PROBABLY CHOSE TO SUPPORT THE LEAST LIKELY WINNER ON THE MMM LIST.

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5. THE MMM POINTS OUT THAT BERENGER RAN IN A DIFFICULT, MAINLY MIDDLE CLASS DISTRICT, AND INCREASED HIS DECEMBER SUPPORT OF 33 PERCENT TO A 46 PERCENT SHOWING THIS TIME. SIX OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MMM POLITIBURO WERE WINNERS, AS WERE A NUMBER OF OTHER MMM ASSEMBLY MEMBERS WHO RAN. THE MMM WINNERS INCLUDED PARTY VICE PRESIDENTS KADER BHAYAT AND SHEILA BAPPOO, WHO WILL PROBABLY BE CHOSEN MAYORS OF PORT LOUIS AND BEAU BASSIN RESPECTIVELY. DUVAL WILL BE MAYOR OF CUREPIPE, AND A PMSD MAN WILL ALSO SIT AS MAYOR OF QUATRE BORNES. THE MMM WILL OCCUPY THE MAYORALITY OF VACOAS.

6. THE MUSLIM COMMITTEE OF ACTION (CAM) IS FINISHED AS A POLITICAL PARTY AFTER SUFFERING A CRUSHING DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF THE MMM IN THE SINGLE PORT LOUIS DISTRICT IT CONTESTED AS THE ALLIANCE REPRESENTATIVE. ITS "NEW FACE" MUSLIM CANDIDATES FAILED TO DRAW EVEN 15 PERCENT OF THE VOTES IN THE PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM PLAINE VERTE DISTRICT. THE CAM WILL DISAPPEAR WITH FEW MOURNERS. AS IN DECEMBER, THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY SUPPORTED THE MMM MASSIVELY.

7. THE PMSD MADE A SOMEWHAT BETTER SHOWING THAN DID LABOR, WINNING 36 OF THE ALLIANCE'S COUNCIL SEATS TO LABOR'S 27. THE PMSD IS SUPPOSED TO BE STRONGER IN THE URBAN AREAS, AND IT PRESENTED MORE CANDIDATES THAN DID LABOR. LABOR'S FAILURE TO HOLD VACOAS WILL TARNISH ITS IMAGE. IT ALSO DID A BIT LESS WELL THAN EXPECTED IN QUATRE BORNES. THOUGH A GOOD ANALYSIS OF THE VOTING PATTERNS IS NOT YET AVAILABLE, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT A GOOD MANY TRADITIONAL SUPPORTERS OF LABOR AND OF THE PMSD STAYED HOME RATHER THAN VOTE FOR CANDIDATES OF THE ALLIANCE PARTNER WHICH THEY HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED THE ENEMY. IT IS UNKNOWN HOW MANY OF THESE PEOPLE SUPPORTED

THE MMM INSTEAD, BUT IT IS BELIEVED THAT MOST OF THOSE
DISCONTENTED WITH THE ALLIANCE ARRANGEMENT IN THE MUNICIPALS
STAYED HOME RATHER THAN VOTE FOR THE OPPOSITION.

8. ONE OF THE FEW TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS TO BE DRAWN FROM
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THESE ELECTIONS IS THAT THE PMSD-LABOR ELECTORAL ALLIANCE
IS DEFINITELY NOT A SURE BET TO DEFEAT THE MMM IN A NEW ROUND
OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. TO THE CONTRARY, THE MMM, IN
RUNNING AGAINST A SINGLE, COMBINED OPPONENT, WAS ABLE TO
BETTER ITS DECEMBER PERFORMANCE DRAMATICALLY, IN WINNING
MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF THE VOTES, AS AGAINST 38 PERCENT
IN DECEMBER. IN NEW ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IT WOULD HAVE ONLY
ONE VIABLE OPPONENT IN THE RURAL AREAS, THAT IS, THE LABOR
PARTY, AND COULD HOPE TO IMPROVE ON ITS DECEMBER PERFORMANCE
OF WINNING 34 SEATS, OR ONE LESS THAN HALF, EVEN AGAINST A
COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT SUCH AS LABOR AND THE PMSD USED IN
THE MUNICIPALS. THE MMM IS LIKELY TO CONCLUDE FROM THIS
THAT IT HAS MAINTAINED ITS MOMENTUM AND SHOULD PUSH FOR
NEW NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN ORDER TO TRY TO WIN AN ABSOLUTE
MAJORITY AND TAKE OVER THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. FOR ITS PART
THE GOVERNING COALITION CANNOT BE VERY ENCOURAGED BY THE
OUTCOME OF THE MUNICIPALS AND IT WILL MOST LIKELY WISH TO
AVOID A NEW ROUND OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.
PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM SEEMS LIKELY TO BE CONFIRMED IN
HIS BELIEF THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OUGHT TO TRY TO STAY
IN POWER FOR THE ALLOWED FIVE YEARS AND NOT RISK ANOTHER
ELECTORAL CONFRONTATION WITH THE MMM.
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